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Committee for Programme and Coordination
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Adoption of the report of the Committee on its forty-fifth session

Draft report

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Addendum

Programme questions: programme planning (item 4 (a))

Priority-setting

1. At its informal consultations on 24 June 2005, the Committee resumed its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on priority-setting (A/59/87) .

Discussion

2. The Committee recalled that at its forty-fourth session it had decided to continue its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on priority-setting at its forty-fifth session and had recommended that the General Assembly defer its consideration of the report to its sixtieth session.[1] The Committee also recalled General Assembly resolution 59/275 of 23 December 2004 in which it endorsed that recommendation. The Committee further recalled Assembly resolution 59/278 of the same date, in which the Assembly decided on the priorities for the biennium 2006-2007.

3. The Committee noted that the report provided historical background on previous debates within the General Assembly and the Committee for Programme and Coordination regarding the question of priority-setting. In that regard, it was noted that Member States previously had been unable to reach agreement on many aspects of the question.

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4. The view was expressed that it was the responsibility of Member States to designate priorities at the macro level for the Organization and that priority-setting was key to the United Nations programme planning and budgeting process.

5. It was stressed that, while it was important to designate priorities, particularly in view of resource constraints, it was important to recognize that action to address new challenges should not be taken at the expense of priorities that have already been designated.

6. The view was also expressed that an additional difficulty with priority-setting was related to the fact that the Secretariat was required to implement all legislative mandates. It was observed that, given the fact that the designation of priorities by the General Assembly reflected general trends of a broad sectoral nature, the specialized intergovernmental bodies should play a greater role in determining priorities at the subprogramme level. On the other hand, the view was expressed that priorities should not be designated by intergovernmental bodies at the subprogramme level because of the way that the plan has been structured and because of the decision of the Assembly that priorities should reflect general trends of a broad sectoral nature.

7. It was also noted that the structure of the strategic framework was not organized to reflect sectoral issues but rather congruence with the organizational entities. It was noted that the structure had been approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/219 of 18 December 1996 when it adopted the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001.[2] In that connection, the General Assembly thereafter did not designate priorities by programme or subprogramme. Priorities instead reflected general trends of a broad sectoral nature. Furthermore, it was noted that the Assembly, in its resolution 53/207 of 18 December 1998, decided that the priorities contained in the budget outline should be in conformity with the priorities in the medium-term plan. It was also recalled that the Assembly, in its resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, had earlier decided that the budget outline should indicate priorities reflecting general trends of a broad sectoral nature. It was noted that for the medium-term plans for the periods 1998-2001 and 2002-2005,[3] the priorities for the budget outline were the same as those for the plans.

8. The view was expressed that difficulties already encountered by Member States with the designation of priorities would be further compounded at the subprogramme level. In this connection, it was stressed that the Secretary-General should have the authority to make judgements at the subprogramme level, taking due account of legislative mandates, particularly since Member States had the opportunity to reject or approve his proposals in the context of the proposed programme budget. In that context, it was pointed out that the Secretariat should fully implement regulation 5.6 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8) so that Member States would have a basis for judging the value of programmes and activities.

9. On the other hand, the view was expressed that priority-setting, at all levels, was the prerogative of Member States and not that of the Secretary-General.

10. The view was expressed that the Committee for Programme and Coordination would have benefited from receiving an analysis or elaboration of the implications that General Assembly resolution 58/269 of 23 December 2003 and the strategic

framework could have on the question of priority-setting. It was stated that future reports on priority-setting should provide the Committee with an assessment of whether or not the reduced time frame of the biennial programme plan has made it easier to reflect the latest legislative developments that could have a bearing on the allocation of resources.

11. Part one of the strategic framework provides an opportunity to expand on the broad priorities of the Organization in more detail than the Secretariat was able to do in the medium-term plan. The view was expressed that future reports on priority-setting should expand on that element.

12. The view was also expressed that the report should have provided a more detailed analysis of the experiences that the Secretariat has gained in the application of the results-based logical framework and how they might improve priority-setting in the Organization. The report provided a great deal of information on what had transpired before 1998 but very little on the impact of the changes reflected in the medium-term plan for 2002-2005, beyond what was alluded to in paragraph 16 of the report.

13. The medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 was the first one to reflect the results-based-budgeting methodology, and the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 was the first budget to be submitted in a results-based format. The performance report for the biennium 2002-2003 thus provided the Committee with an opportunity to evaluate the application of the results-based logical framework for the first time. It was hoped that future reports on priority-setting would expand on the contribution, if any, that the results-based-budgeting logical framework has made towards the setting of priorities, in particular as it is intended to improve the measurement of achievements.

14. It was acknowledged that priority-setting remains the prerogative of Member States and that the use of results-based budgeting may not address the larger question of how to identify, agree upon and designate priorities.

15. With regard to paragraph 35 of the report, it was recalled that in paragraph 19 of its resolution 55/231 of 23 December 2000, the General Assembly emphasized that resources proposed by the Secretary-General should be commensurate with all mandated programmes and activities to ensure their full, effective and efficient implementation. The view was expressed that the priorities, as reflected in the legislative mandates, should determine the resource requirements for the Organization; the resource levels should not determine the priorities.

16. It was also stressed that the level of resources for peacekeeping operations and for the international Tribunals should not have any impact on the level of resources for the regular budget. However, it was pointed out that some Member States viewed their contributions, assessed or voluntary, to the work of the United Nations in their entirety, and decisions on the level of resources for the regular budget, the peacekeeping operations and the Tribunals were inevitably linked.

17. It was questioned how expanding the discussion of resources beyond the Fifth Committee would prevent the "disconnection between planning and resource allocation" referred to in paragraph 33 of the report. The view was expressed that the rules of procedure of the General Assembly guiding administrative and budgetary questions were clear. General Assembly resolution 45/248 of 21 December 1990 was recalled, and the view was expressed that it had further

clarified the mandate given to the Fifth Committee. It was also stated that the latter resolution had been aimed at ensuring that the Main Committees would be able to focus on substantive matters and that resource requirements would not be the overriding factor in setting priorities or determining objectives.

18. The General Assembly did not amend the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation when it adopted resolution 58/269. It was therefore expected that the process of consultations with sectoral, functional and regional intergovernmental bodies would continue and that the relevant regulations and rules would be implemented to the fullest extent possible. Those regulations and rules should apply to all activities undertaken by the United Nations, irrespective of their source of financing.

19. It was noted that the majority of the conclusions in the report have been reflected to some extent in previous reports of the Committee for Programme and Coordination. In view of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 58/269, it was felt that the recommendations of the Committee should focus largely on those issues that are relevant to the question of priority-setting within the context of more recent developments.

20. It was observed that a major feature of the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, as well as the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, was the reallocation of resources among subprogrammes within each programme, without any justification of the criteria for such reallocation, as indicated by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions[4]. In this regard, the need for the General Assembly to give particular attention to this question when considering the present report at its sixtieth session was stressed.

Conclusions and recommendations

21. **The Committee emphasized that priority-setting in the Organization was an intergovernmental process and that priorities represented the longer-term objectives of the Organization.**

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/59/16), para. 19.

[2] Ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/51/6).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6* and corrigendum (A/57/6 and Corr.1).

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-eight Session, Supplement No. 7* and corrigendum (A/58/7 and Corr.1), para. 33.